

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A process for producing an ethylcellulose having an ethoxyl content
5 of from 40 to 55 percent and a viscosity of from 1 to 100 mPa's, measured as a 5 weight
percent solution in toluene and ethanol at a volume ratio of 80:20 at 25°C, which process
comprises the step of depolymerizing an ethylcellulose having an ethoxyl content of from 40
to 55 percent and a viscosity of from 4 to 400 mPa's in the presence of gaseous hydrogen
halide to achieve a reduction in viscosity of the ethylcellulose of at least 10 percent.
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2. The process of Claim 1 wherein an ethylcellulose having an ethoxyl
content of from 40 to 55 percent and a viscosity of from 1 to 10 mPa's is produced.
3. The process of Claim 1 or 2 wherein the depolymerization is
15 conducted in the presence of gaseous hydrogen chloride.
4. The process of any one of Claims 1 to 3 wherein the
depolymerization step is conducted in the presence of from 0.5 to 5.0 percent of water,
based on the weight of the ethyl cellulose.
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5. The process of any one of Claims 1 to 4 wherein the
depolymerization step is conducted in the presence of from 0.1 to 0.5 weight percent of
hydrogen chloride, based on the total weight of ethylcellulose to be depolymerized.
- 25 6. The process of any one of Claims 1 to 5 wherein depolymerized
ethylcellulose is packaged without a neutralization step after depolymerization.
7. The process of any one of Claims 1 to 6 wherein an ethylcellulose
having a viscosity of from 4 to 100 mPa's is depolymerized to an ethylcellulose having a
30 viscosity of from 1 to 2.5 mPa's.

8. A process for producing an ethylcellulose having an ethoxyl content of from 40 to 55 percent and a viscosity of from 1 to 100 mPa's, measured as a 5 weight percent solution in toluene and ethanol at a volume ratio of 80:20 at 25°C, which process comprises the steps of

5 a) etherifying alkalized cellulose with ethyl chloride in the presence of an organic solvent to produce an ethylcellulose having an ethoxyl content of from 40 to 55 percent and a viscosity of from 4 to 400 mPa's and

b) depolymerizing the produced ethylcellulose in the presence of gaseous hydrogen halide to achieve a reduction in viscosity of the ethylcellulose of at least
10 10 percent.

9. The process of Claim 6 wherein the depolymerization step b) is carried out as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 8.

15 10. An ethylcellulose having an ethoxyl content of from 40 to 55 percent and a viscosity of from 1 to 2.5 mPa's, measured as a 5 weight percent solution in toluene and ethanol at a volume ratio of 80 : 20 at 25 °C.

20 11. The ethylcellulose of Claim 7 having a viscosity of from 1 to 2.3 mPa's.

12. The ethylcellulose of Claim 7 or Claim 8 having an ethoxyl content of from 45 to 52 percent.

25 13. Use of the ethylcellulose of any one of Claims 10 to 12 for preparing a tablet coating or a film for controlled drug release.